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Koop Urges Networks to Air Condom Ads February 11, 1987

The New York Times

By Marlene Cimonis

WASHINGTON--Surgeon General C. Everett Koop called on the broadcast industry Tuesday to lift its self-imposed ban on condom advertising, saying that "the threat of AIDS is so great it overwhelms other considerations."

Koop made his remarks at a hearing held by the House energy and commerce subcommittee on health, at which representatives of the three major television networks acknowledged that they are reviewing the issue but insisted that many segments of the viewing population find such advertising objectionable.

However, the surgeon general said he believes that condom advertising is necessary and "would have a positive public health benefit." Short of abstinence from sexual activity, he said, use of condoms appears to be the most effective method of reducing the spread of the AIDS virus.

"There are health messages that could be taken to the public with condom advertising," Koop said. "Also, they would be doing a very big job -- not at public expense. . . ." 'Getting Message Across'

He added: "Advertising might be very helpful in getting the message across to young people, even old people, that anyone who is sexually active should use a condom from start to finish. . . . AIDS kills -- and sexually active people have to be told this."

Although condoms are not failure-proof, they are believed to be the only known "mechanical" way to decrease, if not prevent, the sexual transmission of the virus that causes the deadly disease. Officials at the U.S. Public Health Service and elsewhere have recommended that sexually active individuals use condoms as the best protection against the spread of AIDS.

Koop said laboratory studies have shown that condoms obstruct the passage of the AIDS virus, and several studies involving humans have demonstrated lower rates of AIDS infection among those whose partners regularly used condoms.

But officials from the three major networks told Congress that they intend to continue their prohibition on condom ads for the time being, leaving the decision to their local affiliate stations. **Some Stations Use Ads**

About a dozen stations have decided in recent weeks to accept condom advertising. However, CBS and NBC spokesmen said that network-owned stations in New York, Los Angeles, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Washington -- some of the cities with a high number of AIDS cases -- are bound by network policy.

"As a birth-control device, such ads are offensive to segments of our audience on moral or religious grounds," said Ralph Daniels, NBC vice president in charge of broadcast standards. "Other viewers believe that condom advertising, in any context, inherently delivers a message about sexual permissiveness which they find objectionable."

Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles), chairman of the subcommittee, said the networks are engaging in "media malpractice" and compared their behavior to physicians withholding penicillin from syphilis patients "because they might have encouraged extramarital sex."